

A History of
The Attorney General's Office
S324



By Valerie R. Marvin

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Michigan's present Capitol, the state's third, opened on January 1, 1879, to great acclaim.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The Golden Age of Capitol Construction

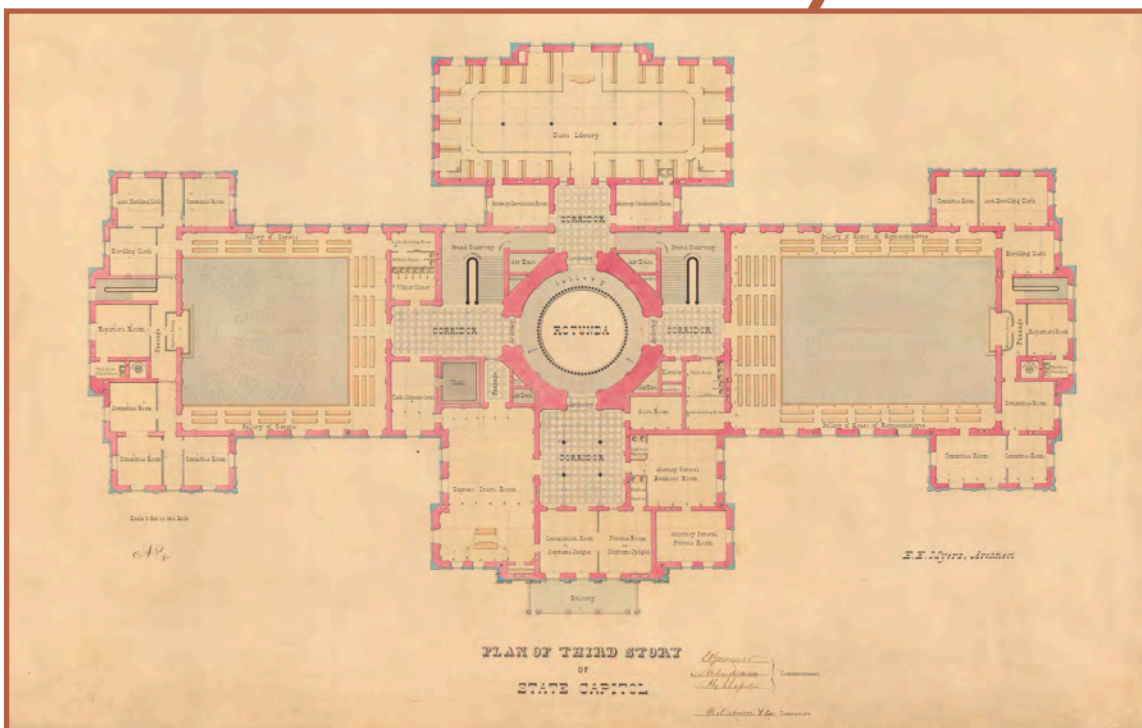
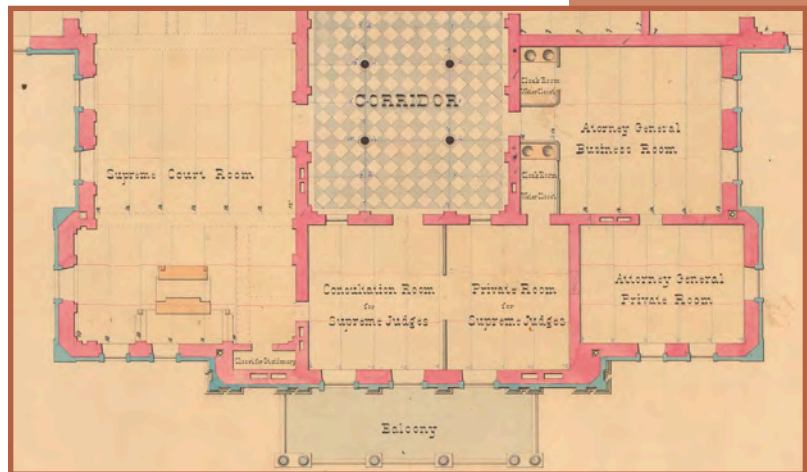
The Michigan State Capitol was built during the golden age of Capitol construction in the years following the American Civil War. From its inception, the building was designed to serve several functions and roles for the state. First, and most importantly, it is the official seat of government for the State of Michigan. It is a public forum where people can express their opinions, and a symbol of governmental traditions and the state itself. Yet the Capitol is also, at its very essence, an office building, where the day to day functions of government have played out for well over a century.

When the Capitol first opened in 1879, it was state government's only active office building, where all three branches of government were housed. The executive branch, including the Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, State Librarian, Auditor General, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Adjutant General, claimed most of the offices within it. The judicial branch was represented by the Supreme Court, which occupied offices and an elegant chamber in the east wing of the third floor. The legislative branch used the House and Senate chambers, the largest and most impressive rooms in the Capitol, as well as offices for the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, and a few committee rooms. There were no offices for individual legislators, who, when in Lansing for brief part-time legislative sessions, worked from their desks on the chamber floors.

The Supreme Court and the Attorney General

Capitol architect Elijah E. Myers designed the third floor's east wing to serve as the home of the Michigan Supreme Court and the Attorney General. At its heart was the magnificent Supreme Court Chamber, arguably the most beautiful and elaborate room in the entire Capitol. The Court's Clerk worked in an office (with a document vault) that adjoined the courtroom to the south, whereas the two spaces to the northeast of the Chamber served as a consultation room and a private room for the Justices, who did not have individual offices. The Attorney General and his staff worked next door in a slightly larger, two-room suite.

The first Supreme Court to serve in the state's present Capitol consisted of four justices: Isaac Marston, Benjamin Franklin Graves, Thomas Cooley, and Chief Justice James Valentine Campbell. Born in Buffalo, New York, Campbell moved with his family to Detroit as a child. After earning admission to the bar in 1844, he devoted his life to the study, teaching, practice, and interpretation of the law. Michigan voters elected him to the court five times, for a total of thirty-two years on the bench. In addition, Campbell served as the Marshall Professor of Law at the University of Michigan for thirty years, where he helped educate many of the state's young lawyers, including future colleague Marston.¹



The Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The third floor plan failed to include individual offices for the Justices.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

According to the State Auditor's 1879 report, the Justices employed one reporter, Henry A. Chaney. Two clerks, H.D. Pugh and Edward Lowe, and two criers, J.B. Baker and J.P. Baker, worked for the Court on a per diem basis.² Logic suggests that these individuals all shared the one-room office in the south hallways, while the Justices worked in the more elegant two-room suite in the east wing.

Attorney General Otto Kirchner and his clerks (Mrs. M.A. Miles, Joseph E. Jackson, and Miss E.C. Baker) worked nearby in the remainder of the east wing rooms.³ Prussian by birth, Kirchner moved to Michigan during the Civil War and began his career in government clerking for the Auditor General and the House of Representatives. After studying law, he was admitted to the bar in Detroit in 1866. A decade later, in 1876, Kirchner defeated two opponents to become Attorney General. He served in this capacity for two terms.⁴

Like the rest of the Capitol, these small offices were designed to be both functional

... these small offices were designed to be both functional and beautiful ...

and beautiful, as befitted a growing and prosperous state. "The offices throughout are elegantly fitted up," a reporter wrote following his visit on January 1, 1879, for the Capitol's official dedication. "All of the doors are massive in finish, and fitted with locks specially made to order and being on bronze hinges, and bearing the arms of the state."⁵ Passing through the main doorway, visitors stepped onto a colorful Brussels wool wall-to-wall carpet, laid in strips and carefully sewn together by hand. Sturdy and tasteful polished walnut desks, chairs, tables, and bookcases stood at attention, ready for use. Tall windows, framed by crisp wooden pocket shutters, ushered in natural light, while elegant new gas chandeliers, purchased from the Mitchell Vance Company in New York, gleamed overhead.

Michigan State Capitol Directory.

LEFT. CENTRE. RIGHT.

First Floor.

Auditor General.	EAST CORRIDOR.	State Treasurer.
Board of Health.	WEST CORRIDOR.	Superintendent of
Commissioner of Railroads.		Public Instruction.
	SOUTH CORRIDOR.	
Auditor General.		Inspector General.
(Tax Department).		Adjutant General.
Commissioner of Insurance.		Quartermaster General.
Supt of State Property.		
	NORTH CORRIDOR.	
Board of Auditors.		Deputy Treasurer.
Secretary of State.		Land Office.
		Swamp Land Office.

Second Floor.

Post Office.	EAST CORRIDOR.	Governor.
	Private Secretary.	
	WEST CORRIDOR.	
	State Library.	
	SOUTH CORRIDOR.	
	Senate Chamber.	
	NORTH CORRIDOR.	
	Representative Hall.	

Third Floor.

Attorney Gen'l.	EAST CORRIDOR.	Supreme Court.
	Justices' Rooms.	
	WEST CORRIDOR.	
Attorneys.	Law Library.	Attorneys.
Consultation Room.		Consultation Room.
	SOUTH CORRIDOR.	
Clerk of Supreme Court.		
	Senate Gallery.	
	NORTH CORRIDOR.	
	Representative Hall Gallery.	

Fourth Floor.

Pioneers' Audience Room.	EAST CORRIDOR.	Pioneers' Office.
Reporter Supreme Court.		
	WEST CORRIDOR.	
	Library.	

Basement.

Board of State Charities.	EAST CORRIDOR.	Auditor's Working Rooms.
	SOUTH CORRIDOR.	
Auditor's Working Rooms.		State Armory
Pomological Society.		and
State Board of Agriculture.		Military Store Rooms.

With Compliments of A. L. Burns, Superintendent of State Property.

This early Capitol Directory survives in the Jenison Collection, a series of six scrapbooks compiled to record the Capitol's construction by historian and collector O.A. Jenison.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Early Changes

As might be expected, changes to these offices, and the rest of the Capitol, were constant. Two major improvements were launched in the 1880s, only a few years after the building opened. First, starting in 1885, electricians began wiring the Capitol for a new technology—electric lights. Prior to this, the Capitol was lighted entirely by gas fixtures. That same year, painters began to decorate the Capitol's plain white plaster walls with an array of rich colors and ornate designs. Slowly, every room, including those used by the Supreme Court and the Attorney General, was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings.

In 1892, the Board of State Auditors directed the Superintendent of the Capitol to survey the building and its contents. He recorded his findings in their annual bound report, which survives to this day. Among the items then housed in Justices' rooms were desks, tables, several chairs, bookcases, a water tank with stand, six foot rests, a shoe black stand, and seven cuspidors (spittoons). The Attorney General's two-room suite contained multiple desks, bookcases, a dictionary stand, a letter scale, a blotter bath, three ink wells, one silver pitcher, two maps of Michigan, and a folding bed.⁶ The last object serves as a reminder that many State Officers did not live in Lansing, and in some cases, served as somewhat absent figureheads.



The Supreme Court, as it looked about the time the Capitol opened. Note the bare plaster walls and ceilings, which weren't decorated until the mid 1880s.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The State Library used a large, open, three-story room in the west wing of the building until 1922. When they left, floors were inserted at the third and fourth story level, subdividing the room in three. The new Supreme Court Offices were at the level just above the columns seen in this c. 1879 image.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



From 1879-1922 the following Supreme Court Justices worked in this east wing space.⁷ *Please note that the years listed reflect the full term of service of each respective justice.*

Benjamin Franklin Graves	1857, 1868-1883
James Valentine Campbell	1858-1890
Thomas McIntyre Cooley	1865-1885
Isaac Marston	1875-1883
Thomas Russell Sherwood	1883-1889
John Wayne Champlin	1884-1891
Allen Benton Morse	1885-1892
Charles Dean Long	1888-1902
Edward Cahill	1890
Claudius Buchanan Grant	1890-1909
John Wesley McGrath	1891-1895
George Harman Durand	1892
Robert Morris Montgomery	1892-1910
Frank Arthur Hooker	1893-1911
Joseph B. Moore	1896-1925
William Leland Carpenter	1902-1908
Charles Austin Blair	1905-1912
Aaron Vance McAlvay	1905-1915
Russell Cowles Ostrander	1905-1919
Flavius Lionel Brooke	1908-1921
John Wesley Stone	1910-1922
John E. Bird	1910-1928
Joseph Hall Steere	1911-1927
Franz Christian Kuhn	1912-1919
Rollin Harlow Person	1915-1916
Grant Fellows	1917-1929
Nelson Sharpe	1919-1935
George M. Clark	1919-1933
Howard Weist	1921-1945

The Twentieth Century

The early twentieth century brought dramatic change to this large and prominent office space. As the number of departments, boards, and commissioners working in the Capitol grew, political jockeying for more office space became increasingly intense. A series of office shifts started in 1903 when the Legislature increased the size of the Supreme Court from five justices to eight.⁸ This meant that the justices would need more room. After several attempts to provide the justices with additional office space in a series of proposed (and failed) Capitol additions, the court simply looked next door, to the offices occupied by the Attorney General.

Where, then, would the Attorney General go? In 1909, desperate for room, the Attorney General petitioned the State Board of Auditors to turn the women's washroom near the Senate gallery into offices for his staff.⁹ This, however, was not enough. Within just a few years, the Attorney General's staff moved down to the first floor and into what had previously been the Adjutant General's first floor suite.

In 1922, the Supreme Court acquired the space formerly used by the State Library in the west wing on the third floor. State Architect Leon Fry built solid floors across the old open Library on the third and fourth floor levels and removed the third floor mezzanine balcony. After spending many years crowded into the offices adjoining the courtroom, and, according to one newspaper article "the attic," Supreme Court Justices moved eagerly into their new office space.¹⁰ At the same time, the court's clerks and criers moved into the eastern suite, next to the Chamber.

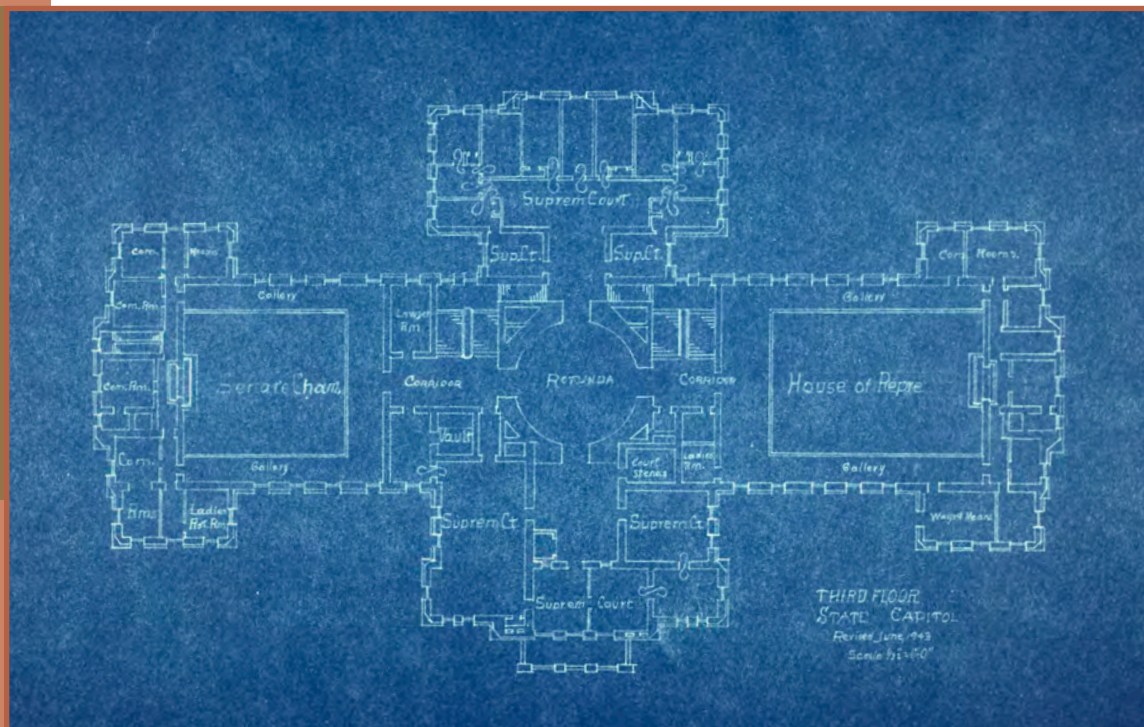
*In 1922, the Supreme Court
acquired the space formerly
used by the
State Library . . .*

The next time these eastern rooms appear in the known historical record is in 1941, when the State Treasurer's office surveyed the Capitol and inventoried the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines in the building. The accompanying floor plans identify the rooms, beginning to the immediate north of the Chamber, as 301, 302, 303, 304, and 305. A total of seven people now worked in four rooms of the suite, which were described as being full of bookcases and home to seven desks and three tables. Room 305, the space closest to the rotunda, was used for the storage of books and other materials.¹¹

Two years later, Treasury repeated the exercise. This time they included not only the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines housed in each office in 1943, but also in 1940. The assignments of the rooms remained consistent, though the number of people working in them decreased from seven to six (as did the number of desks). Room 305 continued to serve as storage, and was, like the rest of the office, full of bookcases.¹²

By the 1940s, space in the increasingly crowded Capitol was at a premium. Only the largest, most powerful parts of state government, including the Supreme Court, retained their Capitol suites. Other departments and divisions used rooms in the State Office Building, or in rented quarters downtown.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



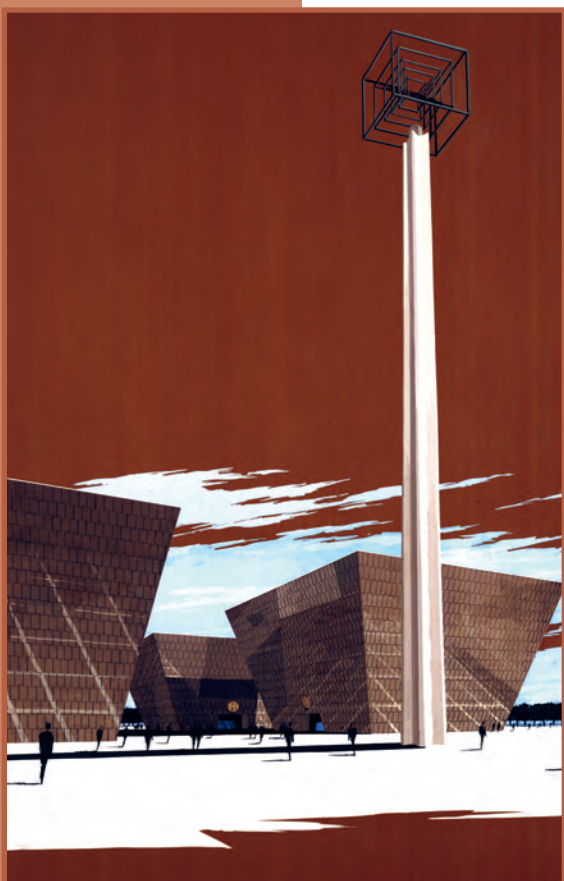
In 1957, architect George R. Page prepared another set of mid-twentieth century drawings for the Buildings and Construction Division of the Michigan State Administrative Board. Page's drawings indicate that the tenancy of the east wing remained unchanged. The rooms now bore new identifiers that ranged from 301 to 303A.

The Legislature Moves In

The late 1960s and early 1970s were times of great change in the Capitol Building. After ninety years of shuffling, squeezing, and relocating, the decision was made to dramatically remodel many of the offices in the Capitol. The action was motivated by a number of factors, including the state's move to a full-time legislature. This had dramatic repercussions for the Capitol building, where the pace of business in both House and Senate spaces increased significantly. As the number of Legislators spending every week in Lansing rose, the call for additional office space reached a fever pitch. In order to

Several of the plans considered for the new Capitol in the 1960s contained three buildings—designed to house and symbolize the three branches of government—and a central pylon.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



accommodate all of these members, space had to be found—preferably in the Capitol. Governor Romney’s preferred solution called for the construction of a new Capitol. While significant steps were taken towards this ambitious goal, ultimately the project was tabled over cost and aesthetic concerns.

When it became clear that a new Capitol was not to be, another solution was proposed. Why not dramatically remodel the Capitol’s offices and committee rooms? The timing seemed ideal, as several of the building’s longtime occupants, including the Attorney General, the Supreme Court, and the Law Library, were moving out of the Capitol and into other buildings in downtown Lansing.

A scheme was developed to capture new space in the old building by subdividing the rooms in half to create two ten-foot tall offices, one above the other. From 1969 to 1972, almost every office on the Capitol’s first, second, and third floors received an overfloor (sometimes called half floors or mezzanines). Offices were modernized by adding drop ceilings, fluorescent lighting, and institutional carpeting and furnishings. Original decorative paint had already been covered by layers of overpaint, paneling, and wallpaper. Almost every vestige of the Capitol’s original elegance and character had disappeared.

Offices, corridors, and even the lobby into the House Chamber, seen here, were sliced in half horizontally to create additional office space in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



By the mid twentieth century only a few original decorative elements survived, such as the ornamental cast iron grates.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

After the Supreme Court left the building in early 1970, their former offices were overfloored and adapted into Senate member offices and committee rooms. A survey of the Legislative Handbooks of this era suggests that the rooms were once again renumbered slightly as 300-302A. The following members and committees worked in this space over the years.¹³

Office Occupants

Please note that the district numbers in the table reflect those in use at the time each respective handbook was printed.

1971-1972	Education Committee			Rm. 300
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
1973-1974	Sen. Gilbert E. Bursley	18th District	Ann Arbor	Rm. 300
	Education Committee			Rm. 300
	Sen. Charles O. Zollar	22nd District	Benton Harbor	Rm. 302
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
	Sen. Gary Byker	23rd District	Hudsonville	Rm. 302A
1975-1976	Sen. Gilbert E. Bursley	18th District	Ann Arbor	Rm. 300
	Sen. Jerome T. Hart	34th District	Saginaw	Rm. 302
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
	Sen. Earl E. Nelson	24th District	Lansing	Rm. 302A
1977-1978	Sen. Gilbert E. Bursley	18th District	Ann Arbor	Rm. 300
	Sen. Jerome T. Hart	34th District	Saginaw	Rm. 302
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
	Sen. James DeSana	11th District	Wyandotte	Rm. 302A
1979-1980	Sen. John Engler	36th District	Mt. Pleasant	Rm. 300
	Sen. Jerome T. Hart	34th District	Saginaw	Rm. 302
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
1981-1982	Sen. John Engler	36th District	Mt. Pleasant	Rm. 300
	Sen. Jerome T. Hart	34th District	Saginaw	Rm. 302
	Appropriations Committee			Rm. 302
1983-1984	Sen. Phil Arthurhultz	33rd District	Whitehall	Rm. 300
	Sen. Jerome T. Hart	34th District	Saginaw	Rm. 302
1985-1986	Sen. Michael J. O'Brien	5th District	Detroit	Rm. 300
	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. 302
	Appropriations and Retirement Committee			Rm. 302
1987-1988	Sen. Mitch Irwin	37th District	Sault Ste. Marie	Rm. 300
	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. 302
	Appropriations and Retirement Committee			Rm. 302
1989-1990	Sen. Mitch Irwin	37th District	Sault Ste. Marie	Rm. 300
	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. 302
	Appropriations and Retirement Committee			Rm. 302

The office is not listed in the 1991 Legislative Handbook and Directory, as the offices were then undergoing restoration.

Traditionally trained plasterers used surviving sections of original cornice to determine the proper profile and elements they would need to recreate.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



The Capitol's Restoration

In 1987, the Michigan Senate and the House of Representatives began the process of restoring Michigan's Capitol. Chief among their goals was to return the building to its original Victorian grandeur while modernizing the many outdated systems within it. They sought to make the Capitol a living, working museum, where the functions of government would continue to play out in a beautiful and inspiring historical setting. In order to carry out this mission, the restoration team, made up of supportive elected officials, architects, craftspeople, and artists, would need to touch every single space in the Capitol, including the old offices once home to the Supreme Court Justices and the Attorney General.

Changes came swiftly. Overfloors and suspended ceilings were removed, returning the height of the rooms to their full twenty-two feet. Tradespeople rerouted and disguised ductwork, wiring, and sprinkler heads. Appropriate carpeting, designed using colors and patterns from the Victorian era, and period inspired furnishings, were crafted and installed. Skilled designers and craftspeople used photographs to recreate original gas lighting fixtures removed in the early twentieth century. New windows, neatly trimmed with appropriate wood shutters and draperies, replaced old.

*Overfloors and
suspended ceilings
were removed . . .*

The restoration also brought with it the need to upgrade the Capitol's fire exits. Until this point, the building relied on unsightly and dangerous exterior fire escapes attached to the stonework. One of the goals of the restoration was to increase safety systems in the Capitol, including installing interior fire stairs for the first time. This became an engineering nightmare, as there was simply no place to put them. After carefully studying floorplans, the restoration team decided to place one of two new interior fire exits in the former storage room in the east wing. In a rather remarkable feat of deconstruction, a vertical shaft was opened that extended from the top of the building to the bottom for the new stairs.

Of particular importance to the restoration was the recreation of the Capitol's historic decorative artwork. Michigan's Capitol contains approximately nine acres of hand painted art. A variety of techniques were used in the building when it was decorated in the 1880s, including stenciling, striping, marbling, and gilding. Over the years, the artwork was painted over many times as styles changed. For the first time, careful research was done to determine the original colors and decorative paint motifs found in these rooms. These colors and motifs were then replicated by talented decorative artists who used traditional techniques to return the room to a proper late nineteenth century appearance.

One of the techniques used in this space is that of woodgraining. The original Capitol Building commissioners made the decision to use white pine as the dominant wood throughout the building. White pine was relatively inexpensive and available in abundance in this period. They did not intend, however, for people to recognize the wood as pine. Once the pine was installed, it was woodgrained—that is, painted carefully to mimic a more expensive wood—by talented artists. In the Capitol, painters transformed yards of humble pine by painting it with the grain of walnut, the most fashionable (and therefore rather expensive) choice of the 1870s. The technique that they used was replicated by modern decorative painters during the restoration. They labored many hours to apply the necessary seven layers of paint needed to mimic the late nineteenth century process.

*The pine was . . .
woodgrained—that is,
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The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992. Rededication ceremonies held on November 19 and 20 of that year celebrated the success of the project, which won many significant state and national preservation awards. That same fall, the building was officially designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor accorded historic structures in America.



The Capitol's traditional woodgraining recipe calls for oil paints, umber pigment, and stale beer, which serves as the binder.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

Post Restoration Use

The completion of the Capitol's restoration brought with it the need to resolve matters concerning the identification and future use of the Capitol's rooms, including this suite, which now serves as the Office of the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. A new numbering system, devised by Capitol Preservation Architect Richard C. Frank, was introduced indicating the ownership of the space (House, Senate, Executive, etc.) and the room's number. Today the suite is numbered S321, S321A, S321B, S321C, S321D, S323, S324, and S324A.

The following members have served in this suite since the Capitol's restoration.¹⁴

1993-1994	Sen. Harry Gast	22nd District	St. Joseph	Rm. S324
1995-1996	Sen. Harry Gast	20th District	St. Joseph	Rm. S324
1997-1998	Sen. Harry Gast	20th District	St. Joseph	Rm. S324
1999-2000	Sen. Harry Gast	20th District	St. Joseph	Rm. S324
2001-2002	Sen. Harry Gast	20th District	St. Joseph	Rm. S324
2003-2004	Sen. Shirley Johnson	13th District	Royal Oak	Rm. S324
2005-2006	Sen. Shirley Johnson	13th District	Royal Oak	Rm. S324
2007-2008	Sen. Ron Jelinek	21st District	Three Oaks	Rm. S324
2009-2010	Sen. Ron Jelinek	21st District	Three Oaks	Rm. S324
2011-2012	Sen. Roger Kahn	32nd District	Saginaw	Rm. S324
2013-2014	Sen. Roger Kahn	32nd District	Saginaw	Rm. S324
2015-2016	Sen. Dave Hildenbrand	29th District	Lowell	Rm. S324
2017-2018	Sen. Dave Hildenbrand	29th District	Lowell	Rm. S324
2019-2020	Sen. Jim Stamas	36th District	Midland	Rm. S324



End Notes

- 1 Chardavoyne, David G., and Paul Moreno. *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*. Second Edition, Michigan State University Press, 2015, p. 56.
- 2 *Annual Report of the Auditor General of the State of Michigan for the Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 1879*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 25.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 517.
- 5 *The Evening News*, January 2, 1879.
- 6 *Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the State of Michigan for the Year 1892*. Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1892, p. 520-521.
- 7 Chardavoyne, David G., and Paul Moreno. *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*. Michigan State University Press, 2015.
- 8 Chardavoyne, David G., and Paul Moreno. *Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide*. Second Edition, Michigan State University Press, 2015, p. 5.
- 9 *Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the Year Ending June 20, 1909*. Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1909, p. 9-10.
- 10 "Work of Moving Nearly 180,000 Books in State Library Nearing Completion," *Lansing State Journal*, March 13, 1922.
- 11 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 12 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.
- 13 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1971-1990.
- 14 *Michigan Legislative Handbooks*, 1993-2020.



Capitol.Michigan.gov